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SUBJECT: FORMER PRIME MINISTER TAMRAT LAYNE MEETS AMBASSADOR

Classified By: Ambassador Donald Yamamoto. Reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

11. (C) On January 5, the Ambassador met former Prime Minister Tamrat Layne, who spent 12 years in prison before his release in late December, 2008. Tamrat was a stalwart of the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF) and the ruling Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) before he fell out of favor. He told the Ambassador that while in prison he had become a Christian and that now he is a "peaceful man, where once (he) did violence and armed struggle." Tamrat said he was treated well in prison due to his stature as a former prime minister and because many of the guards knew him favorably for his armed struggle against the former Dergue regime.

12. (C) Tamarat's wife and two children are in Denver. He had limited contact with his family while in prison and plans to travel to the United States in late January to visit them and to receive a medical check-up, although he said he is not aware of any pending health concerns. On his return to Ethiopia, Tamrat said he plans to "do things for the Ethiopian people." Specifically, Tamrat described his "two responsibilities" going forward as serving God through ministry (he noted that he intends to pursue some form of education toward that end) and playing some to-be-defined role as mediator in Ethiopia. Tamrat insists that he wants to bring "love" into Ethiopian politics and that he holds no grudges against the regime that jailed him. He added that he remains friendly with senior members of the TPLF as well as opposition parties and wants to find a mechanism to facilitate inter-party dialogue.

13. (C) Tamarat said that since his release he has met with several members of the TPLF politburo who told him they are tired of governing and have personal health problems but that they see no alternative to retaining political power because they have no trust that opposition parties will not dismantle the constitution and the Ethiopian state. When asked if Ethiopia can turn to younger generations for political reconciliation, Tamrat noted that the TPLF is training young people to take the reins down the road, but added that he did not know of any similar efforts outside the parliament. TPLF training has an ideological component, Tamrat added.

14. (C) In sepcon with A/PolCouns, Tamrat said that since his release many people from all sides of the political spectrum have asked him to re-involve himself in Ethiopian politics and play an active role in national reconciliation. The Ambassador stressed to Tamrat that the Embassy would support him if he chose to play a mediating role between the government and the opposition or between other elements in Ethiopia. Tamrat remarked that he wants to assist in the

reconciliation of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and the Ethiopian Orthodox Church based in America, because he signed the order that removed the original patriarch and bifurcated the church. Pastor Daniel Gebreselassie, of Prison Fellowship Ethiopia, who joined Tamrat for the January 5 meeting, told the Ambassador that there may be an opening for reconciliation of the two churches, which he will explore over the next few months.

YAMAMOTO